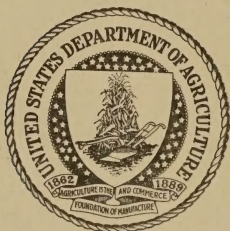


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## INTERESTING FARM WOMEN IN RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

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The progress of rural electrification has been so rapid in the past three years, that we are viewing it with a broader set of concepts than ever before. A much broader interpretation is being placed on the social and economic values of electricity in both the home and the community. The place of the farm family in the rural electrification program is being more sharply defined. This has raised the questions of what farm women are doing that they and their neighbors may use and enjoy still greater benefits of electricity, to what extent are they interested, and what should be done to promote a deeper and greater interest.

The answers to these questions may be varied. We do know that farm women have a particular interest in rural electrification. They are often more conscious of its need in the home than the men. There are many things, however, that point to the fact that much yet needs to be done, to extend the present limits of the interest of this group far beyond any present boundary. This is a challenging task not only to the home economist, but to every other group whose work has any relation to the farm home.

The interest of farm women in having electricity in the home, even on a small scale, is evidenced, I believe, on each of the million and a half farms with electric service; and that interest is constantly being accelerated.

The outlook from that viewpoint is very good, but when we look further and find that even the basic needs in equipment for the health, comfort and convenience of the present users, are far from being met, then we know that a program of greater use has only begun. That over eighty per cent of the homes with electric service are yet without water systems and the conveniences that modern plumbing brings into the home, that sixty-five per cent of the homes are without adequate year-round refrigeration, that ninety-five per cent of the homes are not enjoying the full advantages of electric cookery, prove that a big job is ahead -- to say nothing of the thousands of potential users.

No one will deny that the practices of homemaking on the farm, when it comes to conveniences, have been many paces behind that of farming practices -- even a quarter of a century or more in some areas. Electricity is the one thing that is changing this. It has really started

a peaceful revolution -- particularly in the farm kitchen. How far-reaching this will be depends pretty largely on the part farm women play in shaping a new farm and home program based on sound production, with electricity being used as a necessary tool.

a How quickly this will be accomplished is contingent, perhaps, upon the further development of educational programs that will not only recognize the need for electricity in a well balanced program of farm and home management, but will also meet these needs with timely information before the lines are constructed -- certainly in the early stages of the development.

b The fact that many of the educational forces did not expect this rapid development of such a widespread program, or that it would have such a revolutionary effect upon the communities in such a short time, perhaps, explains a lack of timely information and an adequate means of disseminating it. However, if the progress made by these groups in the past two or three years is indicative of what to expect in the near future, then the outlook is encouraging, indeed.

c This has been pointed out here to show that the problem of developing and extending the interest of farm women in rural electrification is tied in very closely with the whole agricultural program, particularly with the home economics part of the program. Every phase of homemaking is affected by the use of electricity; consequently, the home economist has a very great opportunity to help the farm homemaker use and appreciate electric service in her home more fully.

d Our experience in REA is showing that one of the most important phases of the work of the home economist is to help the homemaker, first, analyze the needs for electricity in the home, and then plan the wiring, lighting, and types of equipment that will meet these needs. Planning on this basis brings the most needed equipment into the home first, and makes provision for additional uses over a period of time. Too long has this approach been neglected. For example, in many areas we find that a rather large per cent of farm families who are without running water in the home, have purchased vacuum cleaners. A recent survey of ten REA cooperatives in Ohio showed that forty per cent of these users had vacuum cleaners, while only seventeen per cent had water systems. The lack of careful planning is, no doubt, largely responsible for this. Many of these homes have comparatively few rugs, and the initial cost of the cleaner would, perhaps, have paid for two-thirds of the cost of an electric water system. Analyses of the jobs of sweeping, and of pumping and carrying water, show that the latter is the much harder of the two, and requires a great deal more time. There should be a place in the buying plan for the vacuum cleaner which does such a hard job so easily and quickly, but I would question the purchase of it first, when the home and farm are without the endless benefits of

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a good water system.

Electricity often changes the whole management scheme of the home, particularly in the kitchen where the greatest number of household operations are performed. Kitchen planning, for example, in the past has been pretty much influenced by "a stove and wood box arrangement" which was tied to a permanent flue. The homemaker often has difficulty in even visualizing these changes and how they will affect her way of doing these tasks. It is here that she particularly needs the help of the home economist. However, the wiring contractors, appliance dealers, and others, could also render a great service. If they had a better understanding of farm homemaking problems, they could do much not only to help these women select equipment to fit their needs, but also to get the best use from it. This service would be profitable to both themselves and the homemakers. Much inconvenient wiring and poor lighting, and many bad choices in equipment stand out as examples of this. a

Many of the conveniences of the refrigerator, the range and other equipment, are sacrificed because of poor location in the kitchen. The range may have been placed on the outside wall, just to save a few feet of cable when it should have been near the dining room door, or it may have been put in some inconvenient place once occupied by the old wood or coal range, for no good reason at all. The refrigerator is often placed on the back porch, in the hall, or some other place outside the kitchen, because it can possibly be operated a little more economically. The economy of the time and energy of the homemaker is often lost sight of in trying to effect a small saving of current. Furthermore, if the farm kitchen is so hot that it causes an appreciable increase in the operating cost of the refrigerator, then it is certainly time to make some changes there -- perhaps, with a ventilating fan, or other means well within the reach of those users. A convenient electric kitchen is a necessity in the farm home. Too long have we been tolerant of the "makeshifts" that are called kitchen conveniences. There are many, including some of the farm women themselves, who must change their viewpoint on what constitutes a convenient farm kitchen, before this part of the program is really made effective. b

Underlying all this, of course, is the need for basic information. If farm women are to plan intelligently for the full use of electricity in the home, then they must know a few simple fundamentals of electricity as applied to wiring, lighting, and selection, operation and care of equipment. While this is another important phase of the work of the home economist, it is also a responsibility that no one working in this field should overlook. c

As important as the planning of the wiring is, we find that many women are often left completely out of the picture at this stage d

of the rural electrification program. The general feeling is that wiring is primarily "a man's problem and job." Even some of the women themselves believe that. However, women must acquire a fair knowledge of the functions of the ~~farm~~ electric service, if they are to help plan the wiring, from the standpoints of convenient use and of safety. With the proper presentation of information, this group can be expected to do a very great deal toward getting more complete wiring jobs done in the farm home. We feel that much has been done through REA utilization activities to work out a well-rounded wiring program in which the whole family actively participates. Let us not say that this part of the program is too technical, too mechanical, and the like, for women to understand. I often wonder ~~whether~~ some of us do not become so concerned over these phases of the program that we lose sight of the human factors involved.

Many of the things said about wiring apply to farm home lighting, since the two are so closely related. Other than the very great need for more educational work on the fundamental principles of good lighting, the most outstanding problem we have encountered has been that of the farm family's not being able to secure good quality lighting fixtures locally at a reasonable cost. The progress REA has made in correcting this is significant. Properly shaded lighting fixtures have been made available in groups to suit varying requirements at a surprisingly low cost. Of course, in addition to developing a more extensive educational program, there is much yet to be done on this particular angle. Through the home lighting program we shall again find a place where farm women can make a very great contribution to rural electrification, not only in having better lighting in their homes, but also in the schools, churches, and other community buildings.

Another approach to gaining a greater acceptance of rural electrification on the part of farm women, is through the income-producing uses of electricity. This is often overlooked. On the average farm over the country, the jobs of the farm and home are so closely interrelated that there is no sharp line of demarcation, even where the use of electricity is involved. The homemaker has a very keen insight into all the farm problems. She is alert to changes that may affect the farm income. The interest is there. It just needs to be awakened and directed.

The fact that electricity will pay its way has a very strong appeal to farm women. They are quick to see its application to such things as poultry, gardening, and dairying. It is my thought that much could be accomplished in getting more of this farm equipment into use, if women were brought into this part of the program. Their experience with the labor-saving conveniences in the home often gives them a much greater appreciation of the need of electricity for farm



uses, ~~than the men have.~~

This is particularly true of the group of women who take care of the poultry flock, the dairy cows and the garden, and who expect to add to the cash income by marketing a portion of these products. If they do these things to help increase the family income, then they should be shown how electricity can be used to pay the operating costs, as well as part of the initial cost of the equipment. Often these "pin-money enterprises" will grow to the extent that they become a very important part of the farm-income program.

In conclusion, let us consider one other approach to this whole problem of developing and extending the interest of farm women in greater uses of electricity. They must be encouraged to take a more active part in the program right from the beginning. We cannot go any faster ~~than~~ the education and experience of the people with whom we are working will permit. For this reason, we want farm families to accept a great share of the responsibility of working out plans for rural electrification and translating them into action in their communities. We believe that this must be done, if rural electrification is to be successful in its broadest sense.

As I have mentioned before, women are often more conscious of the needs for electricity in the home, ~~than~~ men. Active participation in the program will help them analyze these needs ~~for both~~ the home and community, and it will help them to make better use of the information brought to them on specific problems. Furthermore, this working together on a common community need will generate a healthy enthusiasm that is necessary to put any program over.

They should share the responsibility of getting certain definite things done, such as serving on boards of directors of the cooperatives and on the various committees. We believe this is necessary in the sound development of the program. There should be committees on easements and rights-of-way, through which they can do a great deal to help everybody understand the necessity of getting these easements properly executed. There should be committees on best uses of electricity in the home. Here they can do a very effective job not only of selling the idea of use, but also of helping their neighbors with the proper operation of equipment after it is installed. For example, in Texas and Louisiana, these committees are functioning now under the guidance of home demonstration agents, REA home economists, and project officials in a campaign for better use of electric appliances. These committee members hold small group demonstrations, using appliances with which they have had experience in their own homes. Every woman present participates in the demonstration. They

also make neighborly calls on new users, but not in the sense of the professional home service call, to see if any help is needed. Questions that they cannot answer are referred to the home demonstration agent, the home economics teacher, and the project office. This type program is serving as a means of extending the efforts of these local agencies. Many women who have never been active in any community organization before, are coming to these small meetings.

a There should, by all means, be a committee on community activities or affairs that would see that the rural schools, churches, and club houses are receiving the full benefits of electricity. Women work particularly well in community organizations, and if they are used in the capacities mentioned here, and others, they can contribute notably toward making rural electrification a basic part of the pattern of community living, where its long-time influence will be felt socially and economically.





